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DallasNews.com
THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

August 2, 2010 Monday
EDITION1

SECTION: EDITORIALS; EDITORIALS; Pg. A10

LENGTH: 580 words

HEADLINE: DHA's Disservice

SERIES: BRIDGING DALLAS' NORTH-SOUTH GAP

BODY:

Residents who live near Cliff Manor public housing understandably have grown to hate surprises.

Neighbors have spent the summer feeling as if they've been the last to know about plans to move 50 chronically homeless people into the north Oak Cliff high-rise. The Dallas Housing Authority has kept the neighborhood at arm's length, bestowing tidbits of information only when absolutely necessary.

But the creation of a task force had offered some reassurance that neighbors would have a voice. The project was temporarily on hold, and residents were eager to open a dialogue with housing officials.

Then, three hours into the task force's first meeting, came yet another blind-side: the announcement that 17 homeless people were poised to move into Cliff Manor.

Surprise. Again.

The timing would have been laughable if it hadn't been so outrageous.

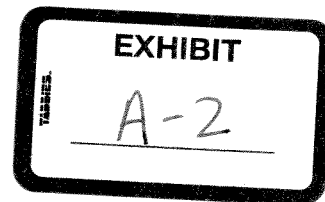
DHA officials have said they had no choice - the agency would be in violation of fair housing laws if it delayed moving disabled homeless people into Cliff Manor. That information should have been communicated to residents immediately - not three hours into a meeting seeking their input.

Incredibly, Troy Broussard, DHA's senior vice president and chief operating officer, then claimed that the agency had never suggested the project was on hold. Mayor Tom Leppert says otherwise.

Add these to the long list of DHA's egregious missteps - which, in this case, at least, are now somewhat beside the point. The Cliff Manor project is no longer on hold. Moving day for the first 17 homeless people is expected this week.

The unfortunate consequence of DHA's communications debacle is that the agency has spurred suspicion and hostility. North Oak Cliff residents rightly feel misled.

As a result, instead of smoothing the path for the homeless headed to Cliff Manor, DHA has done them a disservice. These residents deserve a chance to succeed, and permanent supportive housing gives them the best shot at finding their footing.



As a newly released report reveals, such housing is, indeed, spread across the city. But housing officials must be sensitive to the concerns of residents. The southern half of the city still has the lion's share of total subsidized housing and more than its fair share of DHA-owned units.

City officials also should be cognizant of growing opposition to the possibility of using bond money approved for economic development in southern Dallas to help fund future permanent supportive housing. While these efforts are important, many residents understandably take offense at the idea that housing the homeless counts as economic development.

City officials and homeless advocates got it right with their big idea to create 700 units of permanent supportive housing for the chronically homeless. But sloppy execution has hampered progress.

Even though moving day has arrived at Cliff Manor, officials still have a lot of heavy lifting to do in this neighborhood - and others across Dallas.

North-south split

Permanent supportive housing units in northern Dallas districts

District 9 ... 111

District 10 ... 72

District 11 ... 49

District 12 ... 2

District 13 ... 126

District 14 ... 74

Permanent supportive housing units in southern Dallas districts

District 1 ... 72

District 3 ... 36

District 4 ... 30

District 5 ... 20

District 8 ... 250

Permanent supportive housing units in districts split between north and south

District 2 ... 109

District 6 ... 48

District 7 ... 152

DigitalEXTRA

READ previous commentary on Dallas' north-south gap. [dallasnews.com /opinion/northsouth](http://dallasnews.com/opinion/northsouth)

GRAPHIC: CHART(S): 1. North-south split. 2. DigitalEXTRA.

LOAD-DATE: August 2, 2010